

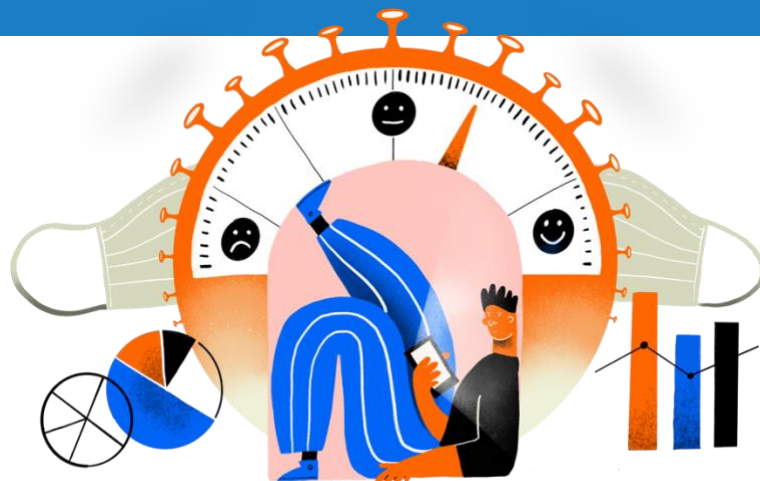
REPORT 23

(Re)building trust: vaccination and the actors of the pandemic

The Motivation Barometer

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Reference: Motivation Barometer (February 11, 2021). (Re)building trust: vaccination and the actors of the pandemic. Ghent, Belgium.



A year ago, COVID-19 dramatically changed our lives and the return to normal life is still quite out of reach. Three months ago, vaccines began to offer some perspective. Enthusiasm for them has continued to grow systematically among the population, but supply difficulties are interfering with the vaccination planning. Moreover, there are uncertainties about the severity of the new variants, their possible resistance to vaccines, and the uncertainty about the transmission of infection after vaccination. In short, the situation has become more complex. The motivation to follow the restrictive measures requested by the authorities is weakening and confidence in the policies to control the pandemic is showing signs of erosion.

Using the Motivation Barometer study, Ghent University, ULB and UCLouvain examined citizens' confidence in the upcoming vaccination campaigns. A total number of 9,253 respondents participated between February 2 and 8, 2021. The majority of respondents are French-speaking (66%) and female (61%), with an average age of 51 years old. About 35% has a bachelor's degree and 30% a master's degree. About 21% of the respondents is sure that they are not affected by the disease, while 62% has no exact idea. 6% of the Dutch-speaking and 12% of the French-speaking participants report having been sick. At this stage, 2.3% of the French-speaking respondents and 3.7% of the Dutch-speaking respondents state they have been vaccinated.

Take home message

- The intention to be vaccinated remains high in both communities, although declining slightly. On the French-speaking side, the average intention is lower.
- Trust in the government over the handling of the pandemic is strongly related to the intention to be vaccinated.
- The difference in trust in the government fully explains the differences between North and South in the intention to be vaccinated.
- General practitioners, pharmacists and nurses enjoy the most trust regarding information about vaccination. They are followed by experts (2nd place) and other actors, such as media figures.
- People who follow and trust traditional media are more willing to be vaccinated.

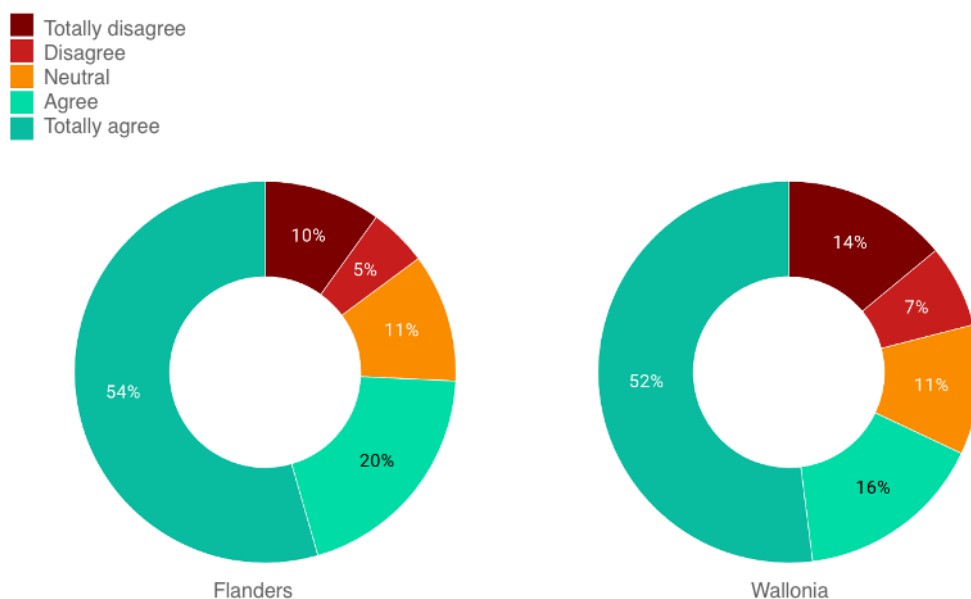
Recommendations

- Let communication about vaccination occur primarily through general practitioners, pharmacists, and nurses; these are actors that can increase trust.
- Listen to and take into account the point of view of different sections of the population when making decisions and clearly demonstrate this.
- This is especially needed on the French-speaking side.

How great is the desire to be vaccinated?

Intention to be vaccinated remains generally very high. As many as 70% say they would like to be vaccinated and only 13% says they have no intention of doing so at all. However, these figures are somewhat different in the different language communities. On the Dutch-speaking side, just over 75% says they want to be vaccinated and only 10% is clearly against it. On the French-speaking side, the numbers are 68% and 14% respectively. At the beginning of January, about 77% of the people wanted to be vaccinated (see report #20). So there has been a slight drop in willingness, especially in the south of the country, but these figures are nevertheless considerably higher than the 57% observed in mid-December (see report #18).

Figure 1. Vaccination readiness by region.



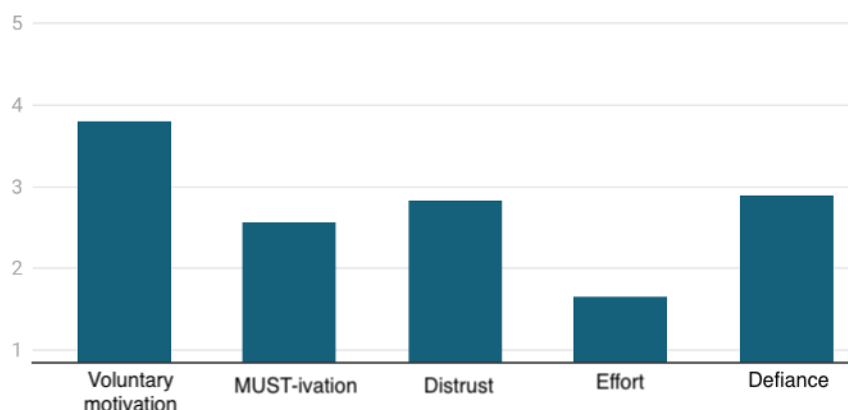
Which motives play the most important role? As a reminder, we distinguish several behavioral determinants:

- **Voluntary or autonomous motivation:** indicates the extent to which one is fully convinced of the benefit and necessity of vaccination, for example because it offers protection for themselves, for their loved ones, or for the population.
- **'Must'-ivation:** indicates the extent to which one feels obligated to be vaccinated, for example, because others want us to do it or to avoid criticism.
- **Distrust** expresses the degree to which people distrust the effectiveness of the vaccine or the person recommending the vaccination.
- **Difficulty (effort)** indicates how much effort the vaccination requires.
- **Resistance (opposition)** expresses the degree of opposition to the authorities, who are seen as a source of interference with individual freedom. This distrust is based on the idea that the measures they take are excessive.

We see, as before, that voluntary motivation is the strongest factor (Figure 1). Distrust also plays an important role (and has increased somewhat compared to previous observations).

If we show how the different factors positively or negatively influence the willingness to be vaccinated (Figure 2), we find the same pattern as previously observed (see endnote): autonomous motivation has a strong positive effect, while distrust, and to a lesser extent resistance, undermines the desire to be vaccinated. The two language communities show the same profile.

Figure 2. Average motivation to get vaccinated by type of motivation



How confident is the population in the handling of the pandemic?

The barometer paid particular attention to the issue of trust in the approach and in information sources with a series of questions in a subsample of about 4,843 respondents. Overall, the results point to the need to engage in dialogue with the population in order to restore confidence and re-engage the population to manage the pandemic, awaiting vaccination. This appears to be the case for at least 70% of the population (see Figure 3).

The perception of expertise/competence of political leaders and willingness to listen to them is rather low among the population, in contrast to healthcare personnel (general practitioners, pharmacists, nurses) and experts who have a very positive image (see Figure 4). They are seen as competent and there is great benevolence towards their messages. The figures show that there is still a very high support among the population for different health care actors, even if there are no more spontaneous actions such as collective applause sessions as during the first lockdown period.

Even though 45% of the sample agrees or totally agrees that "the leaders of this country care about what the population wants" almost 73% also thinks it is a shame that the leaders of this country "do not ask the opinion of the population."

Figure 3. Willingness to be vaccinated by type of motivation

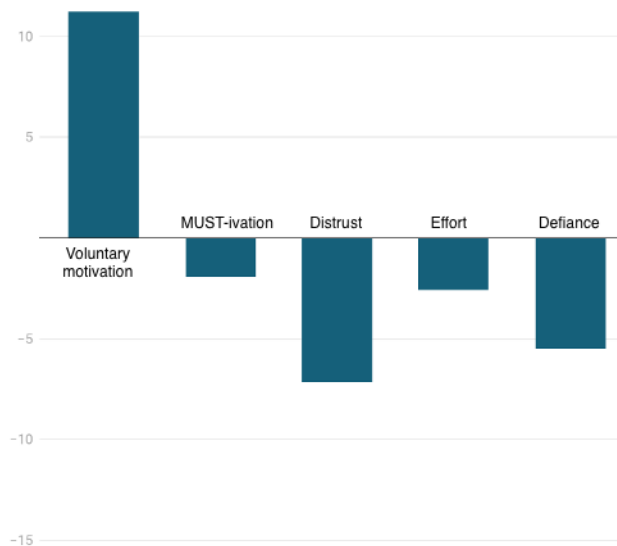
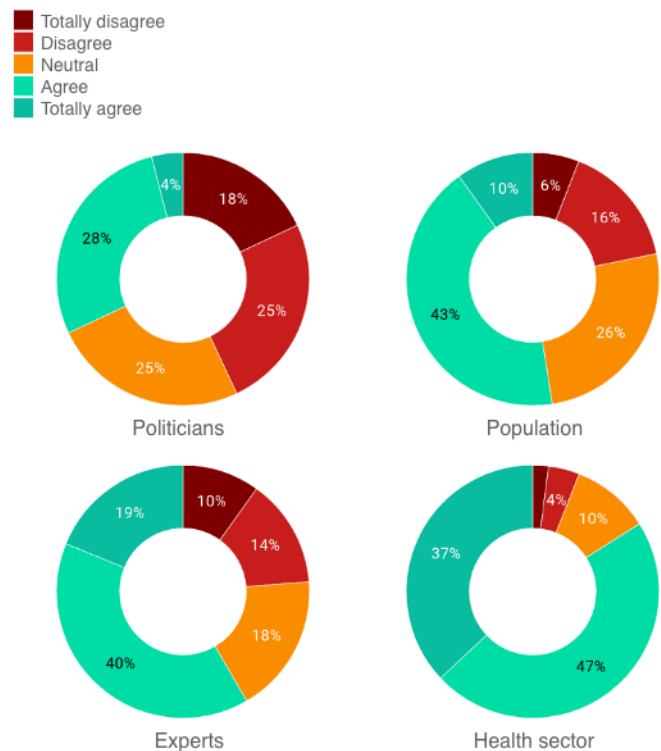


Figure 4. Trust by source

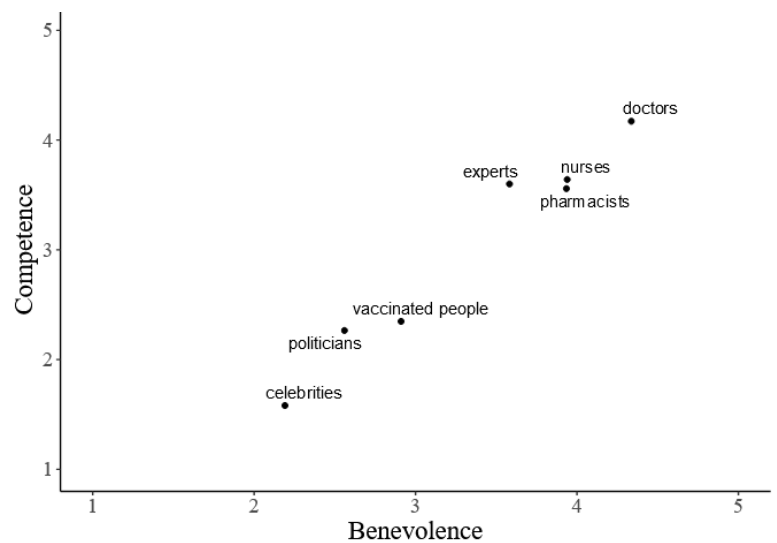


About 40% believes that the population has no influence on the decision of the political leaders (mostly /fully agree).

This ambiguity towards political leaders is also reflected in a range of other findings. Only 32% of the respondents believes that political leaders are capable of working together to control the pandemic, while 43% thinks the opposite (25% has no strong opinion on this). In contrast, only 6% questions the capacity of health professionals and 84% has full confidence in them.

The figures show the results for the same question asked about the population and the experts (i.e. whether the Belgian population or the experts are able to work together to manage the pandemic).

Figure 5. Estimated competence by source as a function of willingness to listen to them



What are vaccination intentions related to?

Trust in political leadership and the public's sense of being heard by them is important for vaccination willingness: the more people see policymakers in a positive way (as competent) and the more sympathetic they are to their messages, the more willing people are to be vaccinated (see Figure 5). On the other hand, suspicion and sensitivity to "conspiracy messages" in general and about such messages about the vaccine in particular is associated with reduced vaccination willingness. In Figure 6, "conspiracy trait" refers to sensitivity to conspiracy thinking in general (e.g., the belief that the state tends to cover up the truth), while "COVID conspiracy" refers to sensitivity to conspiracy thinking related to COVID-19 (e.g., the idea that COVID-19 is the result of a deliberate Chinese strategy to cause an economic crisis).

Figure 6. Willingness to vaccinate.

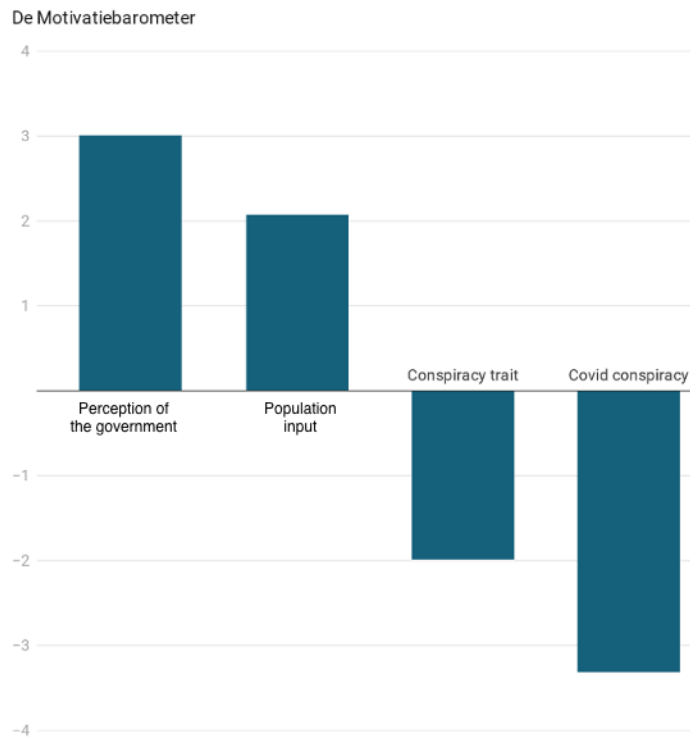
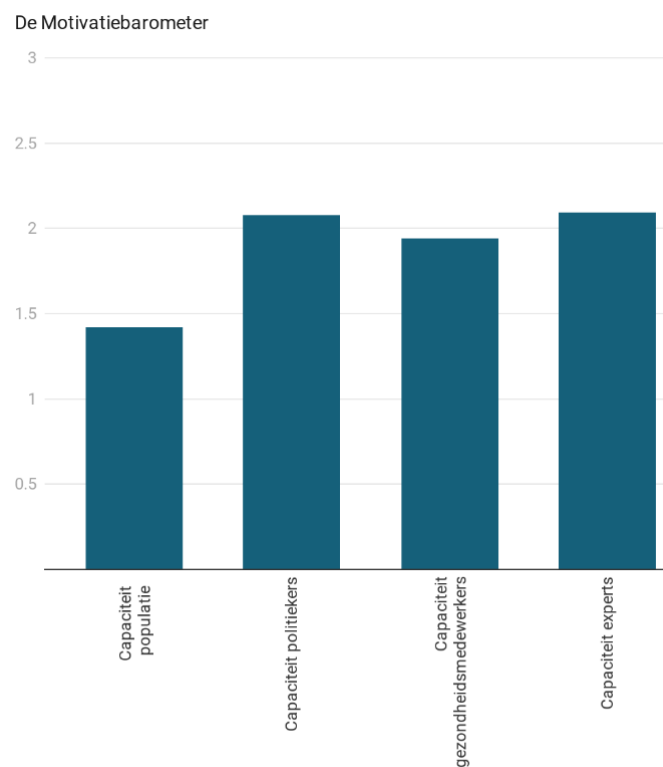


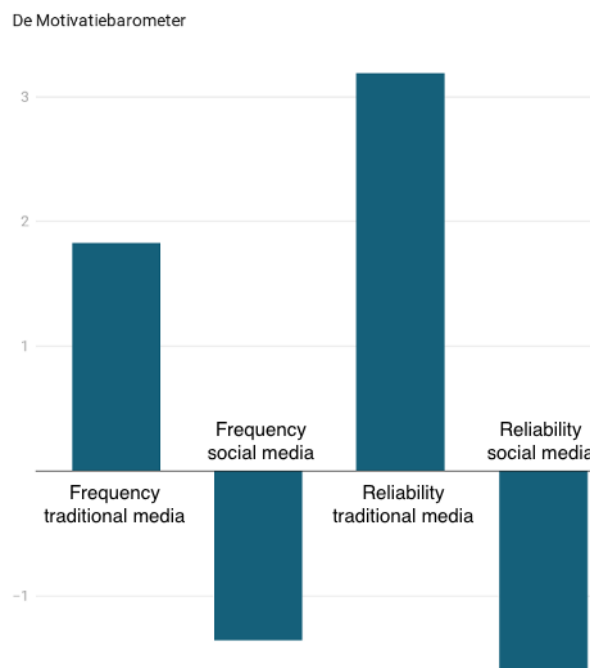
Figure 7 shows that perceptions of the capacity of different actors to work together to cope with the pandemic contribute positively to vaccination intentions.

Figure 7. Vaccination readiness as a function of capacity7



Interestingly, the more respondents consulted traditional media (TV, newspapers), the more inclined they were to get vaccinated (Figure 8). Similarly, the reliability of these media correlates with a more favorable attitude toward vaccination. On the other hand, greater use of social media correlates with lower intention to get vaccinated. Attributing greater trustworthiness to these same social media is also associated with greater hesitancy for vaccination.

Figure 8. Vaccination readiness as a function of media

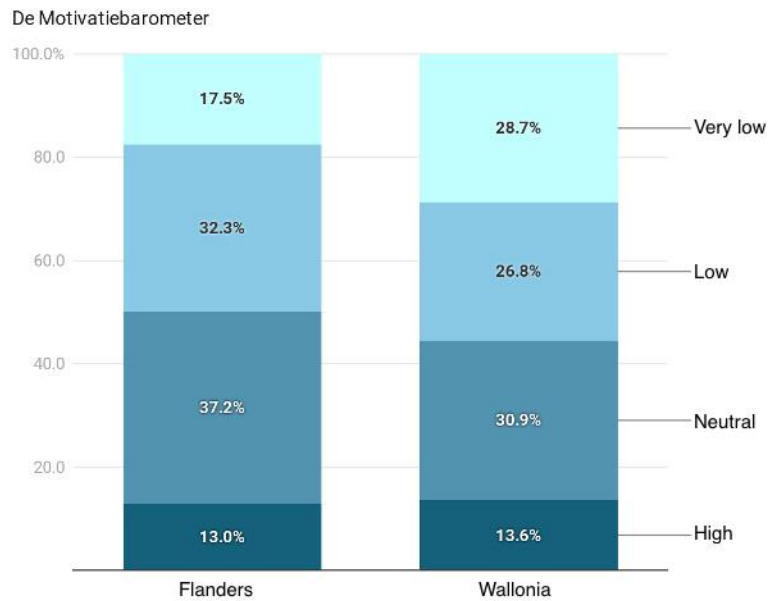


Confidence in government agencies with respect to pandemic control

There is a slight difference between French and Dutch speakers in terms of their intention to be vaccinated. Why is this? Given the important role of trust in the government in the intention to get vaccinated, we looked at whether there were differences between the two language communities on this variable. And indeed, as depicted in Figure 9, we note that more French speakers (55.8%) report (very) low trust compared to Dutch speakers (48.8%).

When we statistically control for this difference in trust in government, the differences between the two language communities regarding vaccination readiness disappear.

Figure 9. Trust in government



Vaccination and adherence to the measures

One may wonder whether being vaccinated will not lead to a lower willingness to continue to adhere to the measures (in the worst case, such a reaction could counteract the positive effects of vaccination). However, our data show that people who want to be vaccinated are also more likely to adhere to social distancing, wear masks, and wash hands.

Endnote of the report

Graphs showing the relationships between a set of variables are based on the "odds ratio" which can show a positive ($>+1$) and negative relationship (>-1). Caution should be exercised for odds ratios < 1 , in which case no conclusion about the relationship between variables is possible.

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